

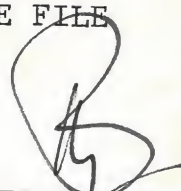
Memorandum



Date: December 1, 1982

To: TO THE FILE

Copy:

From: 
Hugh O. La Bounty
President

Subject: Reflection on the Decision to Terminate the Division II Intercollegiate Football Program at Cal Poly Pomona

(This memo is designed for later historians who may have an interest in the decision to drop intercollegiate football at the university and what motivated that decision. It is not designed as a public document for distribution around the university.)

Yesterday, I announced the decision that the university would no longer participate in intercollegiate football at the Division II level. This announcement was the result of a decision made earlier in the day after a considerable series of discussions, analyses, and opportunity to reflect about the situation over the Thanksgiving holidays.

By way of background, the university's football program and its success performance has not been good since Coach Don Warhurst left the helm of the football program in 1966. In that period of time since Don Warhurst left the program, we have had the following coaches: Ray Daugherty, who served for two years from 1967-68; Roy Anderson, who served for five years from 1969-73; Andy Vinci, who served for three years from 1974-76; Jim Jones, who served for three years from 1977-79; and the current coach, Roman Gabriel, who has served for three years.

These coaches accumulated a win/loss record of 54 wins against 107 losses. Suffice it to say that this kind of a program, where it may offer students interested in football opportunities to perform, was not attractive to the community and to those people who liked to see a good, winning football program. The years up until the hiring of Andy Vinci, in terms of Mr. Warhurst leaving the program and the hiring of Mr. Daugherty and Mr. Anderson, were in the hands of my predecessor, Dr. Robert C. Kramer. Dr. Kramer

involved me, in my capacity as Academic Vice President, in some of the discussions with Andy Vinci; but the decision to hire Andy and the relationship with Andy was one held close by Dr. Kramer, which is probably as it should be. Mr. Vinci brought to the program an entrepreneur attitude. I think Andy was a good coach; he had to spend, as all subsequent coaches did, considerable time in raising funds to support the program. Andy's activities in raising those funds certainly took time and effort from his role as football coach, and it got the university into some rather significant negative relationships with business types in the community; that is, Andy's techniques, his relationships, and his dealings with those business people. Hindsight would now tell me that Andy Vinci probably was the best coach and the best promoter of all of the coaches that I had experience in dealing with. Dr. Kramer determined that Andy should no longer continue (as a matter of fact, that may have been a Cabinet-discussed item, I do not recall that), and we searched for a new coach. I should include here that Dr. James Bell, who was involved in the athletic program with Dr. Kramer, had indicated that Dr. Kramer was willing to give the program up after Coach Roy Anderson and if it had not been for Andy Vinci's ability to sell Dr. Kramer on the notion that he could support the program with outside funds, Vinci would not have been hired and at that juncture Dr. Bell is reasonably sure we would have dropped the program. At any rate, we advertised for a new coach, interviewed a number of them and hired a very prominent local high school coach, Mr. Jim Jones. Jim came to us from South Hills High School in Covina with an incredible record of championship teams for several years, and we looked forward to perhaps a more attractive program for the community--a program that would draw local athletes. For a lot of different reasons that didn't happen, and Mr. Jones and the staff had to put in a considerable amount of time raising funds. The win/loss record was not what we would have liked, and some of his assistant coaches proceeded to get the athletes and the program into difficulty. Mr. Jones left the university with an unhappy separation. He left with charges of dereliction of duty, some personal problems that appeared, and his assistant coaches were obviously involved in funding situations that were not only dishonest, but illegal. It was at this juncture that I had an opportunity to make a decision. Unhappily, I did not do perhaps what I should have done but allowed myself to be convinced by the then new athletic director, Tom Wonderling, and by Dr. Bell that we should continue the program and once again recruit for a coach. I was not enthusiastic about it, but be that as it may we went ahead.

Much to my surprise and amazement, Roman Gabriel, the Los Angeles Rams quarterback from years past, indicated his interest in assuming the responsibility for the program. Gabriel had had no coaching experience except a volunteer assistant coaching assignment at the College of the Desert. He did offer a name recognition and he offered a proven record of fund raising. I was delighted with the possibility that Roman might be able to turn our program around. He embarked as

head coach with, as I recall, only a day or two left in the recruiting season. The NCAA had put us on probation as a result of the activities of Coach Jones, the football coach, and Coach Hogan, the basketball coach, and the cross country coach for putting athletes into a Rocky Mountain program in Gardena, California, where they got credit but did not attend any classes. Gabriel did everything that he said he would, except he did not turn the program around. He is a fine gentleman, and at the end of the first year we had a reasonably good feeling about the program. At the end of the second year, Mr. Gabriel publicly applied for assignments in Northern Arizona and elsewhere, stating that he and his staff were ready to move on because the university is not making a commitment to the athletic program--in this case, the football program. We resolved those issues, although I was distressed that we had to resolve them in public; they should have been resolved between the coach, me, Dr. Bell, and the then athletic director, Howard Hohman.

In the third year, Mr. Gabriel had, by the way, committed himself to a winning program in the third year. We embarked on what I consider to be a very disastrous series of football experiences for our athletes. The season culminated in a one-win/ten-loss record and, at least in my view, I did not think the team was properly coached. The team was supported by more money, more generously than any football team in my experience at Cal Poly; and I was deeply, deeply troubled when Mr. Gabriel, about the middle of the season, started asking whether or not we would continue the football program at the end of this year. I thought it was an ill-advised question simply because it asked that a decision be made without having full view of the entire season. Secondly, if that decision were a negative decision in the middle of the season, that certainly would have impacted negatively on the morale of the athletes. Despite what Mr. Gabriel has said publicly that I refused to answer, I never spoke to Mr. Gabriel on that issue until after the season, and that is when it was given to me as a question by Athletic Director Karen Miller, now the third athletic director in almost as many years, and Dr. Bell. I explained that I would wait until the end of the season to make that decision.

Commencing with the Monday after our tragic game with San Luis Obispo, on Monday, November 22, I embarked on a series of discussions with people who are critical to the support of the program. These discussions included meetings with the chair of the Faculty Senate; with the president and the vice president of the student body; with the president of our CPA, our booster organization; with Athletic Director Karen Miller; with the Vice President; with the Athletic Board, with the Faculty Athletic Representative, Jack Frost; and with the head of the Physical Education Department, Dr. Stan Bassin. Athletic Director Miller talked to the team captains. Athletic Director Miller talked to the coaches. Vice President Bell and

Karen Miller talked to the students in the residence halls. In a word, we had considerable internal discussion. Dr. Bill Fox had done a fiscal analysis for me so that I had some notion of amounts of money that we were talking about. The Director of Public Affairs, Ron Simons, and I had a series of meetings and established a chronology of events that would culminate in a decision announced at a press conference on Tuesday, November 30.

Coach Gabriel was certainly a part of that schedule and he was scheduled for a meeting on Wednesday, November 24. Dr. Bell, Coach Gabriel and I had breakfast at Kellogg West at 8 a.m. on that morning to review the situation with him and to determine his views on the program. It was a good meeting; it took over two hours. Coach Gabriel was very much concerned that I had to make a decision by 4 p.m. that afternoon inasmuch as he was in the process of finalizing an offer from a Boston pro-football team in the new pro conference. I told the coach that I did not feel it was appropriate for me to commit myself to that, that I would commit myself to the first of the next week and certainly no later than next Wednesday, December 1. He indicated that that would not be satisfactory, and I indicated to him two things: one, it was a decision he had to make and that I was not going to judge a very important decision I was going to make adjusted to meet his particular needs; and secondly, I told him that if he left as coach I was reasonably sure that would mean the end of football at Cal Poly. He indicated that he thought that was not right and that his assistant coach, Mr. Criner, could assume the responsibility. I reminded Coach Gabriel that to rebuild a football coaching staff it takes, at a minimum, two months because of the need to advertise, to form committees, and what have you. His concern over my taking a few more days to talk with people and to arrive at a decision was that it would upset the recruiting-- that his leaving and trying to draw up a new football staff would certainly set recruiting back at least two months. I believe then and I believe now that Mr. Gabriel had already made his mind up to leave before the meeting and that what he was attempting to do was to parlay a continuation of the football program without his being the head coach by turning the whole responsibility over to his staff. There is a feeling among those who have some reason to be knowledgeable about football that Mr. Gabriel is not a competent football coach, but he could have succeeded far better than he did had he attracted as assistant coaches people who knew that business. Mr. Gabriel has a deep sense of responsibility to his coaching staff and apparently that responsibility forced him to overlook staff inadequacies. The breakfast, as I said before, was amicable. The issues that were discussed in hindsight probably should have been discussed earlier in the season; but I concluded then and I conclude now that to make a judgment with any finality about dropping football or continuing it in a bad season was totally impolitic. Coach Gabriel

indicated that he would have to make a decision that day. I indicated again that I understood that; it would be something he had to do and that he would have to understand that my decision on his reappointment, on continuing football, and on a number of other matters would have to wait until next Tuesday. He indicated that he would inform Dr. Bell of his decision that afternoon. That afternoon, Coach Gabriel did inform Dr. Bell and I presume Karen Miller, that he would be leaving the university and I assume, although the words are mine not his, would not accept another contract. At this point, and at that point, it is not clear as to precisely what Gabe is going to do although the papers carry a story that he will be the offensive coordinator for a new pro-football team in Boston.

I met with Karen Miller and with Jim Bell at 4:30 p.m. that afternoon. I asked that over the holidays, Thanksgiving being the next day and Friday we were on holiday, at some time during those four days if they would show me how we would continue the program with a 10% cut this year and at least a 15% cut next year. The second thing I wanted was an analysis of what we would do with state monies that might still be in the athletic program if we dropped football. They both agreed to do that. On Friday, November 26, I was playing tennis with faculty colleagues at the university while at home my son and my wife were receiving calls from the Progress Bulletin and the Associated Press inasmuch as Coach Gabriel and his agent had announced that he would not be returning to Cal Poly. The stories of his leaving hit on Saturday in the L. A. Times, the Progress Bulletin, and the Valley Tribune; and I know from a conversation we had with my daughter in Blacksburg, Virginia, it appeared on the wire service back there. Be this as it may, the four days gave Dr. Bell and Ms. Miller time to take a look at things. It also gave me a chance to look at an analysis that Dr. Fox had done and to consider the whole issue outside the pressure of normal office work and telephone calls.

I met with Dr. Bell and Karen Miller at 8 a.m. on Monday morning. They had determined that it would be useless to do a total analysis on how we would keep football inasmuch as it was their judgment that they felt the decision had been made. I indicated that was not true, that is why I asked them to do it; but if that was their judgment I would accept the issue. They did have an analysis about where the money might go should football be dropped. It was a very weak analysis, and clearly I expected not much more. We talked for the better part of an hour and outlined the process we would use between now and when I returned from Berkeley the next morning.

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At 9:15 a.m. I met with the Cabinet. We discussed the issue of continuing or not continuing football. I would say if we had taken an actual vote at that juncture, the decision would have been a stand-off; some wanting to drop and some not. I left that morning to go to a meeting at the University of California, and flew back the next morning.

Upon my return I convened a meeting of Dr. Bell and Dr. Weller and announced my decision that we would not continue football. Subsequently, in anticipation and preparation for the press conference, I contacted Dr. Bassin and informed him of the decision; Lolita Beltramo, the President of the Alumni Association; and Mark Hardwick, the President of the ASI. I could not get in touch with Nick Coulas and Dik Bissing. Ron Simons subsequently did that and informed them. I convened a meeting of the administrative staff at the university at 3 p.m. Tuesday afternoon at which time I informed them of the decision and explained why I had arrived at that.

The press conference started at 3:45 p.m. and was over at 4:45 p.m. The questions that were asked by the press were leading, generally sharp questions; but most of them, if not all, could be anticipated before the meeting.

This morning in the L. A. Times there was a very small article about the university dropping the program after 36 years.

I believe if I had put the issue to a vote, the overwhelming number of people with whom I talked would have wanted to continue football. This vote would have been an emotional vote; I understand and can appreciate it. This vote would demonstrate that there is a sincere interest in football at the university. The problem with such a vote and the problem with continuing it again is one of how we can fund the program to be competitive in Division II. Given the fact that Gabriel has had a highly funded program and has not succeeded, we have not succeeded in attracting the community to the football program. We are walking into a budget situation which I believe is unlike anything we have faced in the State of California before. To be honest, Coach Gabriel's resignation made the decision much easier because the thought of going out and recruiting again, facing the questions from prospective football coaches as to how much money in addition to what we gave Gabriel we can put into the program, would have been self-destructive to the university resources. I think ultimately it would destroy, yet again, another coaching football staff.